IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) An instrument for distracting an intervertebral space, the instrument comprising:

a first elongated section having a proximal end and a distal end, the distal end having at least two prongs extending therefrom for contacting a surface in an intervertebral space, ~~and further having a proximal end and~~ the first elongated section and the at least two prongs having an interior side having at least two laterally-spaced grooves disposed thereon;

a second elongated section having a proximal end and a distal end, the distal end having at least two prongs extending therefrom for contacting a surface in the intervertebral space, ~~and further having a proximal end and~~ the first elongated section and the at least two prongs having an interior side having at least two laterally-spaced grooves disposed thereon;

said first and second elongated sections connected at their proximal ends such that said interior sides face each other, the interior sides forming a passage dimensioned to accommodate the passage of an artificial intervertebral disc and a device for manipulating said disc, said passage effecting distraction of the intervertebral space.

2. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 1, wherein each of said first and second elongated sections comprises a curved cross section.

3. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 1, further comprising a device for releasably attaching said elongated sections to each other at their respective proximal ends.

4. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 1, further comprising a c-clip adapted to releasably connect said elongated sections to each other at their respective proximal ends, each of said elongated sections further comprising a channel for receiving a leg of said c-clip.

5. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 1, wherein at least one of said elongated sections further comprises an exterior side having at least one transversely disposed ridge formed adjacent to the distal end of said elongated section.

6. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 1, wherein at least one of said elongated sections further comprises at least one longitudinal aperture formed medially thereon extending from the distal end of said elongated section.

7. (canceled)

8. (canceled)

9. (previously presented) An instrument for distracting an intervertebral space comprising:

a pair of identical ramps facing one another and converging toward one another and a connecting member operably connecting said ramps to each other, each of said ramps further comprising a concave interior side and at least two intervertebral space engagement members extending from a distal end of said ramp, said concave interior side comprising at least one longitudinally disposed guide that extends along said ramps and said intervertebral space engagement members.

10. (canceled)

11. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 9, wherein said at least one guides comprises at least two laterally-spaced grooves.

12. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 9, wherein said intervertebral space engagement members comprise laterally spaced prongs.

13. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 9, wherein at least one of said pair of identical ramps further comprises at least one vertebral body stop.

14. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 13, wherein said at least one vertebral body stop comprises a transversely disposed ridge.

15. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 9, further comprising an instrument accommodation feature formed medially in said ramp extending partially along the length of said ramp.

16. (previously presented) The instrument according to claim 15, wherein said instrument accommodation feature comprises a longitudinal aperture.

17. (canceled)

18. (canceled)

19. (canceled)

20. (original) The instrument according to claim 1, wherein said grooves disposed on said first and second elongate sections extend substantially throughout the entire length of said first and second elongate sections including said at least two prongs.

21. (original) The instrument according to claim 1, wherein said interior surfaces of said first and second elongated sections are concave.

22. (original) The instrument according to claim 1, wherein said first and second elongate sections include an aperture extending along at least a portion of said first and second elongate sections from said distal ends toward said proximal ends.

23. (original) The instrument according to claim 9, further comprising a c-clip adapted to releasably connect said elongated sections to each other at their respective proximal ends, each of said elongated sections further comprising a channel for receiving a leg of said c-clip.

24. (original) The instrument according to claim 9, wherein said concave interior surfaces face one another.

25. (new) The instrument according to claim 1, further comprising a c-clip adapted to releasably connect said elongated sections to each other at their respective proximal ends.

26. (new) The instrument according to claim 9, further comprising a c-clip adapted to releasably connect said elongated sections to each other at their respective proximal ends.